DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 801 HE 025 621

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TITLE Process Consultancy. The Demand for Consultancy on Group Processes in the Open University--Implications of Change (Report No. 59). Process Consultancy within the Open University 1981-1991 (Report No. 61).
INSTITUTION Open Univ., Walton, Bletchley, Bucks (England). Inst. of Educational Technology.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 41p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Faculty; *Consultation Programs; Course Organization; Distance Education; Educational Technology; Faculty Development; *Group Dynamics; Group Experience; Higher Education; *Human Relations; *Interprofessional Relationship; Postsecondary Education; *Teacher Workshops; *Team Training
IDENTIFIERS Open University (Great Britain); *Process Consultation; Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (England)

ABSTRACT

The two reports combined here provide introductory information on consultancy work at Great Britain's Open University Institution of Educational Technology. The approach at the institution was influenced by the theories and methods developed at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and applied to group relations training. It is noted that the consultancy on group processes has been in response to requests from staff concerned about the effects of stress and conflict on work. The focus of this training is on the emotional as well as the rational aspects of working, teaching, and learning at a distance and is meant to contribute to the understanding of how to facilitate effectiveness and creativity at all levels within and between teams. Also presented is a personal narrative from the program's implementor concerning the six stages that comprised the introduction and development of the consultancy group processes program into England's Open University from 1974 through 1991. The reports include a total of 20 references. (GLR)

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The demand for consultancy on group processes in the Open University - implications of change

Report No 59

Process consultancy within the Open University 1981-1991

Report No 61

Teaching and Consultancy Centre

by Robert Nicodemus

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Teaching and Consultancy Centre Report No 61

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by Robert Nicodemus

1992

Institute of Educational Technology
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The Open University

The **Teaching and Consultancy Centre** is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning** in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.

2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

FOREWORD

This report provides an introduction to IET (Institution of Educational Technology) consultancy work which was influenced by the theories and methods developed at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and applied in institutions and group relations training.

PROCESS CONSULTANCY WITHIN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY 1981 - 1991

Introduction

Toward the end of the OU's first decade (1969 -1979), the first remake of the original courses had begun. Staff began to write about their experiences of working on course teams, think about how to improve on what had already been achieved and, for some, how to improve relationships between staff who had worked on the first courses. An IET seminar presented in 1979 by two consultants from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) opened up a discussion about the dynamic processes in course teams. By 1981 IET was able to offer a TIHR approach of 'process consultancy' in response to requests from OU staff. The focus in 'process consultancy' is on the sources of anxiety in a group or institution which are affecting work at the time. A consultant working dynamically may intervene during a team meeting and attempt to clarify the situation. Such a role is acceptable when it has been requested by a team. Whether working with a team or individual, the consultant must be prepared to become the focus of stressful emotions and to use them for learning. Anxieties about authority and dependence may be an important focus which makes 'process consultancy' very different from but complimentary to more familiar management or 'expert' consultancy.

Over the next ten years (1981-1991) more OU staff became involved in 'process consultancy' in three ways - (a) through dynamic focused work with individuals and teams as described above, (b) through the application of ideas from process consultancy to the development of materials and (c) through staff development - workshops and seminars. Twenty three OU consultancy contracts are listed in the Appendix, including an additional five outside the OU. Staff development activities are listed in TCC report No 63 'Workshops and seminars on team work: 1978-1991'.

Now in 1992, the third remake of courses has begun and, within a technologically more complex environment, questions about dynamics in relationships at every level of the institution are more relevant than ever. Because the work of clarifying dynamics within and between groups begins

within the individual, there is an autobiographical strand in this report which traces my experiences of consultancy.

Background

Five years after the creation of the OU there was sufficient experience of working in course teams for members to began publishing accounts of team work. One of the first was Charles Newey (1975), Professor of Technology who described some of the dynamic aspects of team work. In the following year John Mason (1976), now professor in the Centre for Mathematics Education, drew attention to issues such as conflict and feelings of hopelessness. A brief article appeared in a BBC journal by John Martin (1979), senior lecturer in Systems, who refers to course teams as "erratic, anarchic groupings". The most critical article was by Michael Drake (1979), Professor of Social Sciences, who saw course teams as a negative influence on the quality of courses and efficiency in their development.

These papers reflected some of my own experiences of working with course teams from the time that I joined the OU in 1974. By 1977 I felt in need of some help in work but there was no place in the OU to turn to at that time. In December 1977 I met a consultant in the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and by May 1978 IET had agreed to fund a small a 'pilot study' by TIHR on the experience of working with course teams. The consultants reported their initial findings in a well attended seminar in February, 1979 and in a written report six months later. This project is discussed further in TCC report No 66 'Reflections on the Tavistock Report thirteen years on'.

Six stages of OU work -

Over the past seventeen years my work in the OU can be groups into six stages -

1. 1974 - 1976 induction into course team life
2. 1977 - 1980 training in psychodynamic theory and method
3. 1981 - 1985 team work facilitation focused on dynamics in relationships
4. 1983 - 1986 summer schools - process consultancy and application
5. 1987 - transition to application and staff development
6. 1988 - 1991 consolidating experience, training inside and outside the OU

For some staff and students the context of distance education may provoke anxieties which inhibit as well as stimulate work. Malcolm Crick (1980) reviewed fourteen papers about course teams in the OU and Deakin University (Australia) and concluded that some form of counselling ought to be available to staff and that the teams should be studied. By 1991 aabout three hundred OU staff have had direct contact with process consultancy through the work of 23 contracts and 39 workshops and seminars - about 10% of all staff.

Judith Brearley writes that a degree of "outsider-ness" is beneficial to 'process consultancy' because it gives some objectivity and freedom from being caught up in the processes and helps preserve confidentiality. However, developing consultancy from inside an institution gives opportunities that would not otherwise be possible. I do not think any of the teams or individuals I have worked with would have been able to define the problems clearly enough to seek help or request funds to pay for outside help - even if they knew where to seek it. It took me some time to find the institution which might be able to help as well as offer training. My work with individuals is kept strictly confidential unless agreed before to make it available to colleagues. I have never experienced any objections to writing about consultancies with groups, although I try to get approval for this as part of the contract. There is a danger that a consultant caught up in the dynamic processes may not be able to acknowledge, confront and clarify problems being acted out. That is why some supportive or supervisory relationship is so important in 'process consultancy', to enable the consultant to continue learning from experience. The ability to experience what others are feeling is a invaluable source of information which can be shared and tested out through the guesses a consultant makes about the causes of difficulty at the time they are being experienced. Understanding the 'transference' of emotions from individual to group to institution is an important aspect of teaching and learning as well as consultancy.

Distance education

The Tavistock Clinic 'Consulting to institutions workshop' has provided useful support and comments on my OU consultancy work on two occasions. The first,

taken from my notes, is given here and the second is included in TCC Report No 60 'The Tavistock Observation course: implications for distance education'.

"Distance teaching seems to reverse the conventional relationship between teacher and student. In conventional institutions, students are taught in groups with considerable compromises since learning is an individual thing. Lecturers prepare their materials very much in isolation and what they do is only seen by the students. In the OU students work in isolation and the lecturers are forced to work in teams. The natural competition may lead to regressive behaviour (defenses against learning) in teams because they lack the direct student-teacher relationship. Because learning becomes very flexible at a distance and the materials can be adjusted to avoid frustration and difficulty, learning can become very idealized. For the lecturers too the absence of real students and the difficulties they would present may make teaching idealized, perfect as a machine. The potential persecution that a machine-like relationship represents could be absorbed by a consultant. They want to improve the machine (what IET should do) and you want to improve them as human beings in teams. How have they not managed to get rid of you or do they just tolerate you with no obligation to act on anything you reveal? You could have become a symbol of a comprehensive innovativeness i.e. we even have someone studying how we work and trying to improve it. The fact that you still work alone suggests you have become an ambivalent figure representing disappointment about less idealized relationships or views of learning. What will they do when you leave? What kind of student has been attracted to such an environment? Do they prefer to avoid the pressures of direct relationships? What kind of staff have been attracted to such an environment and what keeps them there when they find it uncomfortable? Your consultancy may have revealed some personal entanglement with difficulties in the environment. Does this lead to more insights about yourself or the institution?"

I will attempt to extend these observations and address the questions through the rest of this report.

Some testimonials

I have included here comments from just four staff about their experiences of process consultancy or individual work counselling. They will help in understanding my work in the OU and may be linked to the beginning of contracts listed in the Appendix (i.e. the first two from 1988, then 1983 and 1989.

1. From one member of the IET Management Committee - "We became more alert to any tendency to exclude or diminish a member or members of the group, and to seek the reasons for such behaviour within the group and in its relationships to other groups...Robert invariably comments on an aspect of the meeting I am myself troubled by - often some conflict I feel I have played a part in. I'm much happier to have it out in the open and, as a result, I suspect none of us broods about our conflicts as much as we might otherwise".

2. From one member of the Centre for Mathematics Education - "One of our concerns in Mathematics Education is with stimulating teachers and pupils to pause every so often and reflect on what they are doing. But activity is very addictive, and pausing is hard. As a group, the content of our discussions is usually attractive, and it is hard to rise above the content. As a non or honorary Centre member you were able to gain our respect, so that we would listen to you, and to stand apart from the content and observe details of interactions. The potential to use your presence and viewpoints more fully may not have been fully exploited, but it was helpful to the group functioning".

3. From a course team chair - "When I joined the course team it was in some disarray because of personality conflicts and lack of clear academic objectives. At the second meeting I attended, there was a major blow-up between two members, a walk out by one, leaving the rest of us wondering how to handle the damage. Robert presented us with a clear and helpful analysis which gave some perspective on the difficulties and how to handle them. He also consulted with the person who had walked out and helped substantially to heal the rift...His presence and his periodic interventions helped to relieve tension and to keep some perspective on our activities and

the group relations that were developing. As the course progressed, relationships got much easier although the team experienced the usual continuous pressure of meeting deadlines...Although there was some resentment at his interventions, simply because people are unaccustomed to look at their group role objectively, I have no doubt that Robert substantially assisted us through a difficult period and continued to act as a support throughout the course production period."

4. From a course team chair after a year of work counselling - "One of the most acute and disturbing aspects of chairing the course was the sense of isolation exacerbated by the sheer volume of my work. I felt disorientated by being unsure whether this isolation was real, that my colleagues had abandoned me to the responsibilities none of them wanted to share, or imaginary; was I just stressed? It's difficult to convey the strain of it all. The course team was for a variety of reasons fragmenting, the Faculty, unsure of financial resources, kept changing its mind about our course budget, my Head of Department unable to deal with the actual problems kept pressuring me to hold everything together. Responsibility was being dumped by every one onto me. It's easy in such a position to blame oneself; to feel that the problems are some personal failure to chair a course adequately, even though I'd chaired a demanding and highly successful course before. Surely I was experienced enough? Despite hearing all the repeated statements that I was the only person capable of chairing this difficult course and course team, the self doubts became unbearable. Significantly, none of the academics on the course team were prepared to talk about such issues; the couple of non-academics who I could talk to had seen it all before and were depressingly pessimistic about improving the situation."

"I got to the point where my workload, the fragmentation of the course team and institutional pressures, all of which seemed external, became as acute as my internal worries and doubts. I remember coming across an article on work related stress and to my horror could tick all of the symptoms. Quite by accident someone in another Faculty learned how I felt and recommended one of her colleagues, experienced in work counselling, to me. It took me a month to take up her recommendation; even though I

felt I couldn't cope, it still seemed that I should be able to sort out the problems on my own. After all, hadn't I chaired a course before? This is part of the trap, believing that the difficulties are some personal fault, unaware that my situation was not unusual in the University, and only discovering by chance that there was help available. Being able to talk to someone who had helped chairs of courses in similar positions was an enormous relief; I wasn't going mad! Talking though my experience and the demanding practical and psychological aspects of chairing the course enabled me to perceive the complexities of the course team's interrelationships and the peculiarities of the Institution. Counselling provided me with ways of understanding my experience and with dealing positively and productively with particular situations. Not that it solved the problems, for they were endemic to the Institution and to the course team structure. I became convinced that counselling should become a publicly available and essential part of the University's provisions for its staff. But for the University to agree would be to acknowledge that which Institutionally had been kept 'secret' for so long."

Personally, I found it difficult asking for these testimonials because this acknowledged my dependency needs i.e. to help explain and justify my work and to satify requirements for my 'accreditation' in consultancy through the Scheme for Professional Development operated by the Churches' Training Group (Board of Education, General Synod of the Church of England). Historically, the consultancy work leading to this accreditation had begun as a result of a course I attended in 1977 lead by members of the Churches' Training Group. They had pointed me towards Tavistock 'group relations training' and its usefulness in institutions. Group relations training was started in 1957 in Leicester and is also known now as the Leicester conferences (Miller 1990). In group relations training psychodynamic theory and method are applied to an educational event designed to evoke group processes which are encountered at work in institutions. I discuss this further in TCC report No 69 "Group relations training and consultancy'.

Another description of process consultancy

As far as I am aware, only one IET colleague, Dr. Judith Riley (1986) has ever referred to my work in a published paper. She describes five approaches to

educational technology and distinguishes mine as 'the social analyst'. She writes - "The social-analyst is focused on the team members, both as a group and individually. He is not concerned with their personal problems. His aims are that they should become more aware of their own behaviour. He wants to develop their understanding of the psychological process involved in team working. He is not hoping for a cessation of all conflict, but that the inevitable tensions in the group should be used constructively...he believes that offering interpretations of their behaviour to a team introduces a new and positive awareness into their work. He particularly values his techniques of reflecting back the team's behaviour so that they can perceive it. He usually bases his interpretations on an eclectic selection of psychological and psychoanalytic theories. He is not in the business of labelling people's degrees of mental health, he is not making diagnoses of individual personalities, but rather he is pointing to common phenomena of team work. He believes that he is an interpreter and hence a facilitator, but that he cannot offer advice. He expects a few members of a team to be excited by his ideas, a few others to reject them entirely, and little enthusiasm for his work from the majority. He welcomes the diversion of hostility from other team members to himself." (p. 12-13).

The only change I would make to Judith's description, which is based on detailed knowledge of my work up to 1985, is that my interpretations are more likely to call attention to sources of anxiety that underlie what is overtly observed. I find that team members can make their own psychological interpretations once they are more aware of the complexity of the situation and how unconscious anxieties are communicated through projection i.e. their relocation from one person into another. Reflecting back on my work through 1991, I have been surprised how seldom I have become object of persecutory anxieties in a group, as would be expected from psychodynamic theory. However, at an institutional level (inter-group), persecutory anxieties were much more in evidence as described further below and elsewhere (Nicodemus 1985).

Six stages of OU work - an autobiographical account

1. Induction (1974 - 1977) I joined the OU in 1974 with thirteen years of experience in higher education as a lecturer, teacher trainer (funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, USA) and researcher (funded

by the Nuffield Foundation and grant from the Social Sciences Research Council, UK). I joined my first course team against the advice of colleagues in IET and their concerns turned out to be fully justified. The team was split in half, ideologically, with some of the conflict focused through me in the middle, as I now understand it. The next team had three different chairmen in the first year. I have no records or notes from those years nor did I present any seminar or workshops, in sharp contrast to my activities since 1978 as well as before 1974. If I kept notes, which I can not remember doing, I disposed of them as if they were a bad memory - an acting out of the psychodynamic process of splitting and projection i.e. split off bad experiences and project them outside.

Towards the end of 1977 my doubts about my own abilities, worth and identity began to be focused as a result of attending an eight week course - 'Christianity and groups' (October - November). This was my first exposure to group leaders taking on a role of facilitating the processes in the group of just eight people who were from a number of local churches. The group wanted the two leaders to behave in a familiar way, as experts telling them what to do or believe. As the members became angry with the leaders and each other, I was reminded of my experiences in OU course teams. I had not expected this and I asked the leaders where they had trained and where I could read something about their approach. They suggested four organizations - TIHR, the Grubb Institute, Marriage Guidance Council and the Institute of Group Analysis. After making contact with TIHR I noticed that the Tavistock Clinic offered courses related to psychoanalytic theory and as a result of further enquiries enroled in the 'Observation' course nine months later in September 1978.

In February 1978 I wrote an internal OU paper "Group dynamics in course teams" which drew upon a book by Wilfred Bion (1961) and a three day Tavistock Institute conference - 'Explorations in Relatedness' - I had attended in December, 1977. In this paper I was clear about the usefulness of a psychodynamic approach for understanding working in groups or OU course teams. Although this clarity continued through most of my work with teams and individuals, my consultancy activities at the inter-group level were not to remain as clear until recently, more than fourteen years

later. What changed was the development of my own capacity to contain anxieties related to the institution. This will become clearer through the examples of consultancy.

In May 1978 IET approved a pilot project with consultants from TIHR and I began to arrange interviews for them with OU staff. By February 1979 three consultants had interviewed about fifty staff and observed meetings of a course teams for some months. This pilot project also marked the transition from induction into training.

2. Training (1978 - 1980) By September 1978 I had embarked on courses in three institutions - the Tavistock Clinic, Marriage Guidance (MG) and the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA). I also attended a five day 'group relations conferences' at the Grubb Institute. Although excessive, I had taken on this much because I did not know which course would be most relevant to working with groups in the OU. I stayed with the Clinic's 'Observation' course for four years, trained as an MG counsellor for nearly three years and completed the IGA 'Introductory course' in one year. IET refunded my course fees. Since the courses were mostly in the evenings and weekends, they did not interfere with OU work. I have estimated that the four years of courses was equivalent to the amount of time an OU student needed to complete four credits of study. I began to appreciate the pressures OU student are under when working full time.

The year from September 1979 was the most intense for study and I was glad to focus my efforts here to avoid further reactions in the OU to the printed Tavistock report of August 1979. I had been informed by IET management that any further activities along the lines of the Tavistock report were to be done within my own personal time, not the OU's time, because some senior OU staff thought such activities were a waste of funds as well as as counter-productive. Although I had not written the Tavistock report, I was seen as responsible for it. However, many other staff through the report to be very valuable.

The ambivalent feelings in the OU about the Tavistock report were very difficult for me, especially following my experiences in course teams where

people did not seem concerned about effects of the dynamics on colleagues or the work. Lacking a clear way to think about these events, my personal memory of 1974-77 is one of fragmentation and confusion. However, by 1979 I, along with other colleagues, had been introduced to a psychodynamic theory which helped make sense of experiences at the time they were happening. A positive result for me is that I was more able think about the different kinds of anxieties people were expressing through their behaviour. One tends to be more aware of persecutory anxieties i.e. about threats from the outside. But the ability to be aware of depressive anxieties, or concern about the destructive potential from inside (within teams), represents a development in learning and awareness of ambivalent feelings - especially one's own responsibilities in a difficult situation. The Tavistock consultants had tried to clarify the importance of depressive anxieties in learning but the difficulty this presented evidently made their consultancy feel more like a critical assessment for some staff.

It may seem unwarranted to use such extreme and technical terms (splitting, projection, persecutory and depressive anxiety) to describe my experiences. But it is perfectly possible to function adequately in some areas of one's life while other areas feel like a disaster. The psychodynamic language give proper emphasis to the power of unconscious and emotional experiences in relationships.

3. Course team facilitation (1981 - 1985) Because I had been associated with the Tavistock report, a course team approached me for help in their new course. From past experiences they were worried about the effects of team conflict on course materials. This was the first of three 'process consultancies' with course teams, out of a total of fifteen OU contracts in which I worked 'dynamically' with individuals and groups. The biggest change compared to my earlier course team work was being appreciated and my presence desired, even though I called attention to problems in team meetings. I also talked with individuals outside meetings and sometimes this developed into a significant piece of work counselling, which was part of the consultancy contract. Description of some of this work has been published (Nicodemus, 1983 1984) and included in TCC report No 65 'Development of a course team'. My first contract for individual work counselling separate

from working with the course team (they had rejected the idea) proved to be such a challenge that I had to seek supervision for the work (also funded by IET). In addition to this dynamically focused work were eight contracts focused on applied work, inherently less demanding. Five more contracts with groups outside the OU were all dynamically focused.

4. Summer schools (1983 - 1986) Consultancy in OU summer schools presented a new difficulty in opening up discussion of results more widely e.g. committees or seminars. In summer schools, staff who represent four geographically separate parts of the institution are brought together in one location - the centre, regions, students and part-time tutors. Integration at this level of an institution evokes more powerful anxieties because of greater complexity and separation between groups and individuals. In effect, anxieties at all levels of organization come together at the inter-group level. Depressive anxieties about integrating separate, possibly fragmented, bits of a system are very difficult to bear. Thus, it is difficult to find listeners or support to further develop consultancy at an institutional level.

   My first contract was initiated through informal discussion with an administrator in the Residential Schools office about one summer school site where there were difficulties between students and staff in three courses. Obtaining agreement from all the people who might be concerned took some months. In the summer I attended two different weeks on one site. The anxieties I had experienced in course teams were nothing compared to what I experienced in summer schools, as well as later in the regional office where I tried to discuss this work (Nicodemus, 1985). Further details are in TCC report No 68 'A consultancy in summer schools'. I doubt that I could have completed this work without the considerable experiences I had by that time working with colleagues as well as my own training. At the end of the project the relevant OU committee could not find time to discuss my report. Because they had not requested it, the report was not given any priority for time.

   My second contract was with three senior counsellors who wanted to study the impact of summer schools on students. Because my role was to help analyze tape recordings of interviews with students before, during and after

summer schools, this contract was intended to be more applied than dynamic. However, we found that we had to focus on the dynamics between us as well as within ourselves individually because of the strong emotions the interviews provoked. Through this second project we saw the importance of support for such emotionally disturbing enquiry, where the lives of students as well as staff were starkly revealed through interviews. The months that it took to review the taped interviews also functioned as a form of staff or self development for all of us. When we tried to bring the results to a public discussion in the form of a seminar, one of a series organized by Regional Academic Services (RAS) in 1986, it had to be cancelled because of a lack of interest. We were especially surprised because the three of us presenting the seminar represented three separate groups of staff - central, regional and part-time tutors. We were too naive about the resistance to learning which depressive anxieties can provoke.

The failure of this RAS seminar can now be seen as evidence of things not happening, of a negative (or absent action) form of acting out at the institutional level. This is only one of many instances where things that could have happened did not and one is left guessing about the unconscious processes involved. This work is discussed in more detail in TCC report No 67 'Interviewing students and staff in summer schools'.

In the third summer school contract, I took up a process consultancy role in relation to an OU staff group to help the BBC interpret group experiences they filmed to use as part of another course. Although initially successful, this work did not lead to further discussions even though they would have been relevant and I had attempted to extend them.

5. Transition (1987) In 1986 I found myself transferred, without prior discussion, from TCC (Teaching and Consultancy Centre) into a temporary two year programme - the Course Innovations Programme (CIP). In retrospect, this event seems to represent an uncomfortable level of ambivalence in IET about my work - that it did not seem to fit clearly in IET along with the hope that I, along with a few others in CIP, would come up with something more useful. There were three positive effects of my transfer. For the first time I felt I had a 'home' in IET. I used the opportunity

to conduct a Tavistock style enquiry into the impact of technological innovations (devolution of financial control and electronic publishing) on staff. My substantial reports did not generate any discussion outside our small CIP group. Again, as in summer schools, I was drawing attention to the inter-group level of the institution. Perhaps more important, I began to defend my work and justify it more vigorously through internal discussion papers. That year I wrote seventeen out of a total of eighty written between 1978-1991.

6. Consolidation (1988 - 1991) In 1988 a more positive attitude towards my work began to emerge from IET management, which Ellie Chambers initiated as the new director of TCC. Professor Derek Roundtree also suggested that I conduct a process consultancy in the fortnightly IET Management Committee meetings. I was pleased with this expression of confidence and trust and the consultancy continued satisfactorily for a year until Dr. Clive Lawless took over as director of IET. Although I was invited to continue the consultancy, the change in director seemed a natural break which did not exclude the possibility of a further contract.

I also began to apply my experiences to the analysis OU course materials, staff development activities and formulation of policy in more applied work. Between 1978-1991 I also presented thirty-nine OU workshops and seminars and an additional ten outside the OU, all focused on 'process consultancy' work. I took on more individual work counselling and found an opportunity to include psychodynamic theory in a mathematics course for teachers, described further in TCC report No 64 'A psychoanalytic perspective on learning through OU videos'.

Many more consultancy opportunities arose outside the OU and one of these with the IRS (Inland Revenue Service) provided a basis for comparing the OU with a very large organization.

OU and IRS compared

The IRS approached the OU for help to develop distance training material. Some OU colleagues helped them develop material for clerical staff while I worked with a team who trained inspectors. They specifically wanted to improve human

relations skills in training but a second issue was their relation to the central office. Their role was split between being 'experts' in work tasks in the regions (as inspectors) and as 'facilitators' or tutors for staff training. The roles tended to get confused at the regional level. The consultancy provided some unexpected insights about working in the OU. I also found some similarities between their experiences and mine, in being heard and clearly seen in shifting role from facilitator to expert, from working with dynamics in relationships to distancing oneself from them to get on with the proper work valued by the institution.

I was never able to get clear what my other IET colleagues were doing with the IRS, who was doing what with whom. In one case my lack of information let me to mistake what the IRS team wanted. I suggested that all IET colleagues involved meet and discuss our experiences to get a better picture of the IRS environment but there was not enough interest to get this together. Eventually I took my experiences to the 'Consulting to institutions workshop' I have attended at the Tavistock Clinic since 1982. Although details of their discussions are confidential, I can extract from them some of the comparisons they made about the IRS and OU as institutions. First I will describe my initial work with the IRS tutors.

We planned three workshops to be conducted over a few months. Prior to the first workshop (two day residential) I read their substantial Tutor Manual and reports on training events. This proved to be a very difficult task because the materials did not always match the events and there were many unfamiliar technical terms and abbreviations. When we met they were taken aback that I had put so much work into understanding what they were doing and had made such an accurate summary of it on which to base my recommendations (21 in total) to discuss over the two days. I wondered what was the nature of a work culture where the tutors felt no one could understand what they were doing or would want to? In the evening I too was taken aback, being given the 'bridal suite' at the hotel complete with pink frilly decor. Was this symbolic of something or mere chance? The hotel was not full.

I have summarized my notes from the Tavistock discussion of my three IRS workshops and comparisons made with the OU under six topics -

1. Dynamics. The difficulty in knowing what was going on in IRS or between them and OU colleagues reflected a number of dynamics - (a) between the expectation that people will reveal their financial position and their desire to avoid revealing as much as possible, (b) between human relations defined as a good thing in training but within the IRS system experienced as persecutory (from the central office), (c) between being told what to do (by the large Tutor Manual) and the the desire to be flexible. As a result, each time you planned a workshop programme you ended up doing something different to a considerable extent. For them the split between good and bad, a fundamental societal dynamic, was re-enacted in their role as tutors.

2. Two institutional cultures. Your flexibility was a key to your success. You were able to do enough to help them improve their training but you were also flexible enough to show that you understood their difficulties. The work you did in preparation for the first workshop (relating the Tutor Manual to their reports on training events) and your twenty one recommendations showed how determined you were to understand them. Another person might have said "it is impossible to figure out what you are doing on the basis of the little usable information I've been given". Their surprise at how much you were able to understand suggests an expectation that an outsider from a very different institutional culture could not understand.

   The OU is an example of a 'flat' professional, individualistic and flexible culture. IRS is centralized and bureaucratic, tutors are managed and have to report to a committee. IRS communication is more formal and easier to see but less flexible. OU colleagues are expected to communicate although it is more difficult to see because it is informal. In IRS you are expected to make plans but it is more difficult to enjoy, especially because plans may not work.

3. Isolation. IRS staff are expected to be 'instant experts' who can function autonomously in their job, who do not help each other. Placing you, on your own, in the hotel 'bridal suite' seems to represent their feelings about isolation. Staff in IRS feel picked on, thus people tend to become passive and no one takes responsibility. Your difficulty organizing relations with

them in light of your colleague's activities reminded you of aspects of the OU i.e. isolation from colleagues and students.

IRS tutor's idea of 'assimilation' of knowledge and testing it in students at the beginning of their workshops is intimidating, like you having to fill in a tax form or asking them to read published papers on human relations before the first workshop. There is another tension here between the idea that finances are relevant to society in contrast to ideas about human relations which may seem to have questionable relevance to their work.

4. Authority and persecution. In IRS there is a persecutory system which people outside want to get away from (tax collection) but the IRS staff are also the object of persecution (central office). To support the work is 'good' but is felt to be 'bad'. The tutors were worried about the first workshop with you (because of the reading you sent them) and wanted to get out of a persecutory system and have a good week-end as human beings. Their focus on your twenty one recommendations was a safe way to proceed, to see where they were going rather than take risks with something more unpredictable. Thus, you felt to be in a supportive role with them rather than a threatening authority as expert. Two reactions to being intimidated are feeling confused or persecuted.

5. Individuals or system. Over the three workshops they gradually emerged as individuals, able to think through what they had been doing over the past few years and what they were handing on to others about the system they work in. They gradually became increasingly concerned about their vulnerability as individuals, isolated and assigned to less desirable regions or not able to be flexible.

In a 'flat' professional organization like the OU, others do not know what you are doing. The lack of knowledge may give rise to persecutory or paranoid anxieties because the 'potency' represented by being able to work on your own is threatening to others. In a hierarchical organization like IRS the feeling is more one of oppression from knowledge or too much technical detail.

IRS and the OU are both distanced from the 'users', the people who are the focus of their work, and the emphasis on human relations in IRS training is an attempt to personalize the situation. But the more 'individual' that people feel, the more that persecutory anxieties may arise.

6. Risks. It is difficult to know how far to go into human relations. Through the three workshops they seemed to become increasingly anxious, feeling what isolation is like and then feeling controlled by higher up. If you avoid addressing this directly, you may collude in avoiding anxieties and their effect on the work and the system. If you go too far, you will be rejected.

   Through your struggle to make sense of the Tutor Manual and training, you passed the 'assimilation' test but what can they do with a bright student? Do you seduce him (give him the bridal suite) by turning the contract into something else? Your workshop plans were largely irrelevant to what happened. When is responding flexibly right and when is it a diversion from the task? Although they improved their training course, the real task seemed to be something else i.e. to see if an outsider could figure out their situation, experience and trust him to help address their own feelings of isolation. If the emphasis of their work is largely on technical training, what gets missed in them as individual human beings? Because you were able to 'assimilate' indigestible material, might there be hope for them being more than just for assimilation of merely technical material in their system?

   How do you judge when you have enough information and you can let the rest go? As independent people they have to make decisions all the time yet they work in a system which wants control of all information - teaching policy and materials. The idea of letting information go, because it is not as important as getting on with other things, is a fundamental tension in teaching as well as in institutions and is represented in the tension between the two cultures of the IRS and OU.

The individual can only do the best he can but is it possible to debate what he cannot do in a hierarchical, controlling and persecutory system? An emphasis on human relations may help. Thus, people seen in a stereotyped way have a hope

of being seen as normal people. Tax collectors as human beings, OU tutors as less than perfect.

Secrets?

The lack of specific details which led to the observations above should not obscure how they were arrived at. The psychodynamic based theory is particularly clear, not secret, and provides methods for enquiring into unconscious processes. Although the technical language is difficult, the greatest challenge to learning it is within oneself. In my opinion, the very diverse members of the Tavistock workshop bring together, effectively, knowledge and skills everyone potentially has. The knowledge is essentially a model about understanding systems and relationships in terms of their dynamics and what these are leading to i.e. clarifying boundaries, containing the polarizations which occur across boundaries and being able to tolerate the risks inherent in development i.e. not knowing or not controlling what ever is separate, separating and evolving. The skill is being able to trust in one's emotions and use them for learning, particularly through explorations in groups. The language of 'object relations' based theory often threatens people or puts them off for many reasons e.g. dislike of confrontation and the apparent (but misleading) emphasis on a kind of technical description of objects and part-objects in the unconscious world. I think there is a need for more emphasis in learning (especially at a distance) on the integration of emotional and rational aspects of experience.

In process consultancy, integration of 'here-and-now' experiences is an important focus which has to be clearly agreed in a contract before work begins, if one is to have any hope of being heard or for the work to lead to some constructive results. A good introduction to process consultancy is provided by Campbell and others (1991)

I believe there is an institutional view emerging in the OU about the function of dynamics at an unconscious level in learning at all levels - individual, group and institution. Already we have enough examples to relate three levels of development in a psychodynamic theory (e.g. boundaries, containment, development) across every level of the organization, as described in more detail in TCC reports already mentioned.

And what about the global aims of the OU or distance education generally? To what extent will we come to understand ourselves sufficiently (as individuals in teams) to help others outside consider the various kinds and sources of truth, to focus sharply from two perspectives, one vivid, one clear - the internal reality of emotions and the external reality of reason, or what may be clearly seen or read about at a distance? As we approach the 21st Century the relevance of 'consultancy from within' to all levels of experience - individual, group and inter-group will become increasing important.

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Appendix. Summary of group process focused consultancy and counselling
Year begun - *and length of contract* (d = dynamic focus, a = applied work)

1978

Tavistock Institute of Human Relations - consultancy through IET on the experience of working in and with course teams. Initiated and coordinated by R. Nicodemus, May 1978 - August 1979

1981

Geology course team S236 - Facilitation of team work, meetings with chair, interviews with individual team members, presentation of seminar for discipline on team dynamics and relations with the BBC. *26 months* (d)
Chair of course team A - Individual work counselling. *2 years* (d)
Consultant to residential conference - Bishop of Southwark's Advisory Committee on Pastoral Care and Counselling. *2 days* (d)

1982

Social Sciences 'Meaning studies' seminars - Intervention in discussions and interpretation of group dynamics. *8 months* (d)

1983

Genetics course team S298 - Facilitation of team work and individual work counselling. *2 years* (d)
Advanced diploma in curriculum and teaching E801 - Facilitation of course team meetings. *2 years* (d)
Residential Schools Office (RSO) - Study of the impact of summer school on staff, requested by head of RSO, interviews and interactions in seven courses on one campus over two weeks, follow-up interviews, and meeting with Regional staff. *5 months* (d)
Citizens Advice Bureau - Consultancy on team work - *6 months* (d)

1984

Study of student's experiences in summer school - Analysis of audio tapes of interviews with students by members of Senior Counsellors Research and Development Group, facilitating meetings to discuss results. *15 months* (d,a)

1986

Reading diploma summer school P334 - Consultation with staff on group process and contribution to BBC filming of experiences in course *2 weeks* (d)

1987

Materials in action T201 - Weekly meetings with chair to discuss experiences of course team meetings, interviews with individual team members. *11 months* (a)

Impact of technological innovations on staff - IET Course Innovations Programme, interviews with over fifty staff, presenting report. *10 months* (a)

1988

IET Management Committee - Intervention in and summary of fortnightly meetings, discussions with individual Committee members. *1 year* (d)

Coordinator of Academic Staff Training - Regular meetings with Professor L. Haynes, analysis of human relations skills in two CVCP papers, development of a classification for evaluating training. *7 months* (a)

Professional Diploma in Post-compulsory Education D05 - Evaluation of courses with group training material, recommendation of criteria for assessing training in group work. *2 months* (a)

Community Education - Evaluation of a scheme for 'human relations education', evaluation of group work in P524. *3 months* (a)

Enquiry into experiences of students and staff in summer school - , Debriefing meetings with Arlene Young after her experiences of the day. *2 weeks* (d)

Centre for Mathematics Education - Facilitating team work, interviews with individual Centre members. *1 year* (d)

NHS Community Mental Health Team - Facilitation of team meetings. *7 months* (d)

NHS Mental Handicap Team - Facilitation of team meetings. *7 months* (d)

1989

Using Mathematical Thinking ME 234 - Evaluation of video tapes and student feed back. *2 months* (a)

Course team B - Individual work counselling with chair. *30 months* (d)

Course team B - Individual work counselling with team member 1. *1 year* (d)

Course team B - Individual work counselling with team member 2. *2 months* (d)

1990

Learning and Teaching Mathematics EM 236 - critical reader of drafts, writing video and audio cassette notes, written contribution "psycho-analytic perspective" to final review unit. *2 years* (a)

Learning and Teaching Mathematics course team EM236 - Evaluation of materials and writing for the review unit 'psychoanalytic perspectives'. *15 months* (a)

Inland Revenue Service - Consultancy to central training team. *6 months* (d)

1991

Roles and Relationships course team K663 - Evaluation of draft units and audio tapes, recommendations about theoretical perspectives. *1 month* (a)

Teaching and Consultancy Centre Report No 59

The demand for consultancy on group processes in the Open University - implications of change

by Robert Nicodemus

1991

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The **Teaching and Consultancy Centre** is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning** in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.

2. **To maintain a knowledge base** for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.

3. **To provide consultancy and training,** inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.

FOREWORD

Paper read at the 25th annual conference of the Society for Research Into Higher Education 18-20 December 1989 on "Access and Institutional Change".

THE DEMAND FOR CONSULTANCY ON GROUP PROCESS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY - IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

ABSTRACT

Ten years ago the OU's Institute of Educational Technology broadened its work in the area of human relations to include consultancy on group processes in response to requests from staff concerned about the effects of stress and conflict on work. Consultancy or enquiry by staff into the hidden influences of groups on work has included activities as diverse as individual work counselling, interventions in team meetings and workshops on team building. Our focus on the emotional as well as the rational aspects of working, teaching and learning at a distance contributes to understanding how to facilitate effectiveness and creativity at all levels within and between teams. We have found that consultancy on group process provides opportunities to test out and change assumptions about each other and the environment in which we work. A model for understanding and intervening at all levels of an institution is offered as a contribution to the literature on managing change.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-two years since it was established, the OU has conducted and commissioned many studies which have led to changes in organizational structure and the use of new technology. Of particular importance is the computer. The OU may be said to exist only because of the computer which keeps track of 80,000 degree level students, over 5000 part-time tutors and over 100,000 students in continuing education courses. In contrast there are only about 3000 full-time staff.

For a few students and staff the OU becomes, at times, an overly exciting place to be. Over the past ten years I have been in the fortunate position to explore with just a few hundred staff why the OU may be a disappointing or frustrating place as well as an exciting one. Are the extremes of experience simply what one would expect in any complex and creative learning environment? Or are there insights available about the nature of institutions, how teams develop and become integrated within a system which furthers independent learning - insights which might contribute to change? Because I work in the OU's Institute of Educational Technology (IET), an academic unit charged with institutional research and development, I have had a base from which to develop a new area

of work with colleagues which I call consultancy on group processes. In this brief paper you will see how this kind of consultancy differs from conventional practices and why it should be part of any professional package offered in institutional research and development.

Over the past ten years consultancy has been offered in response to the concern of staff about disruption of work in teams. Although they were highly competent staff they found that some problems in human relations were difficult to resolve or even predict and prevent. This consultancy work developed at a time that second versions of the original courses were being produced. The teams of staff who produce courses, or course teams, wanted to improve on what had already proved successful. The first teams I worked with were from departments with international reputations and were experienced in the complexities of the OU system. Perhaps because many of them had worked together previously they were concerned to improve how well their teams worked.

By consultancy on group processes I refer mainly to interventions into what is going on at the time in a team, committee or other working group. An intervention draws attention to unconscious aspects of behaviour and to influences of the institution on the team which are not easily seen. An intervention always changes what is happening and supports team members in their own efforts to manage themselves and their relationships with each other.

DEMAND FOR CONSULTANCY

After these early consultancies there was a steady demand for such work from individuals and many kinds of groups such as a seminar group, staff researching the impact of summer schools on students and staff, and a management committee. All these consultancies have been initiated by academic staff who want to address the impact of organizational structure and dynamics on work. All six of the original academic units of the Open University (from 1969) have now participated in consultancy through individuals or groups.

There has been only one request from the non-academic side of the OU and this was for consultancy with academic staff in a troublesome summer school site. The only initiative from administration to work with them directly was never approved in part, I believe, because it involved staff from separate administrative and academic units. Consultancy at the intergroup level requires commitment at very high levels of an institution. Administrative staff (including secretarial and clerical) have not been neglected, however, and have

been interviewed as part of an IET study of the impact of innovations on staff and have participated in seminars and workshops on teamwork. Non-academic staff make up nearly three quarters of all employees in the OU.

AMBIVALENCE ABOUT CONSULTANCY

I should say here that the response to consultancy on group process has been mixed, especially early in its development. One reason is the emphasis on unconscious and emotional processes which, if not disapproved of, may be unfamiliar and threatening. We also know from work at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations that anxieties become displaced on to a consultant who offers ideas rather than solutions and this approach can frustrate participant's hopes and expectations. Indeed, an important function of this kind of consultant is to become a "good" or "bad" figure who can then use his or her own personal experience of others to make sense of what is going on and test it out at the time with those present but the virtue of this may not always be acknowledged by them.

In my earliest consultancies with course teams I invested more time in talking to individuals outside meetings and writing reports for the team rather than intervening or interrupting events during team meetings. As I acquired more experience and confidence I found that the most effective input was within the meetings. This, after all, is where difficulties are most acutely experienced. When working with a number of tutor teams at summer school, consultancy became more difficult practically and emotionally as my representation of good or bad became increasingly polarized. The increased anxieties associated with complex situations probably accounts for why opportunities for consultancy between separate groups have been rare.

I would like to give you now four brief examples of consultancy with: a course team, an individual course team chairman; and two summer schools. As most of you know, in the OU, full-time staff produce courses and part-time staff tutor the students. The team that produces a course, a course team, consists of a variety of people including academics based at the centre in Milton Keynes, academics based in Regional Centres called staff tutors, a BBC producer and an editor. The team will meet at least once a month for two years and more often during intense periods of work. The only time full-time and part-time staff ever come together is during a residential week in a summer school.

A COURSE TEAM

In my first example, a course team asked me for help because of the conflict which had disrupted their work on an earlier course. After nearly two years of consultancy I gave them a final report which summarized what I had observed and the effects of my interventions in their meetings. I also gave them a copy of my notes which were about one-third the length of the minutes of the meetings. Comparing my notes with the minutes seemed to describe two different events! Nevertheless, the team only made one suggestion to delete one sentence in my notes. I wrote later that - the results of the consultancy was "felt to be both effective and positive. The members really did become better at listening to each other and at understanding how the institution may both add to problems of production as well as help to solve them... For example, the difficulty the chairman had in keeping the meetings to the agenda, the arguments a staff tutor had over the proportion of course materials with an historical perspective, the resistance of an academic to criticism of his unit and the conflict with the BBC producer over selection of presenters for TV programmes. The sequence of these difficulties appeared to be highly significant to the development of the course team and the strengthening of both interpersonal relations within the team and with outside groups." (Nicodemus, 1983 p.202-3). In the OU, some of the events in teams may be understood in terms of the developing interdependence, trust and commitment between separate parts of a complex distance teaching system. How effective is consultancy from the view of participants? I will now offer you some written comments by staff from teams I worked with.

The chairman of the first team I worked with wrote the following - "your intervention in meeting 10 when the late author was being torn limb from limb is a specific example of your kind of contribution that no one else would have made - dealing with the conscious business and the unconscious business to give him a hard time because he was late...You bring out into the open the frustrations we and the editors had...A more diffuse effect on people beginning to look at the team processes in ways you were is it offers a different interpretation to an everyday approach...Components of your inside-outside analysis were right and useful to look at..." For the entire two years there were also difficulties between some of the academics and the BBC producer who shared the following thoughts with me - "Compared to the early days there seems to have been a loss of trust between course teams and the OU/BBC production centre. The old problems keep reappearing with no sense of improvement." In reflection, my main achievement in an intervention

concerning the producer was to deflect the anger onto myself. This instantly reduced the tension in the team thus facilitating their concentration on work.

The chairman of a second team I worked with wrote the following - "I feel more competent than previously as chairperson and it is beyond doubt that the team members are now functioning much more than they were as a cohesive creative unit. The insights...enable us to work to each others strengths and to work in supportive ways rather than in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion."

Finally, the chairman of a third team I worked with wrote that my "role of consultant forced us to take time out of an overburdened schedule to examine our work as a group, to reflect upon the dynamics within the group and our links with other environments within the University. These extra demands were not always popular and interventions were not welcomed or approved of by every course team member. Nevertheless, the availability of a consultant is refreshing in the sense that it enables us to reflect on how we work and how to improve our learning so that we can be more effective. An inevitable aspect of this is the emotions generated and by tackling this ourselves we can apply these understandings to other learners".

There are some human costs to the institution which consultancy may reduce but cannot totally prevent. There are staff who drop out of teams or are less productive because they cannot work towards a more creative point in relationships. The team may benefit superficially because the "drop outs" carry away negative feelings which might inhibit work. In the longer term everyone loses out because the anxieties which preceed creativity are never resolved.

A COURSE TEAM CHAIRMAN

In my next experience of consultancy I saw how important it was to come to grips with the emotional impact of work in order to sort out the complexity of teamwork. A colleague I had known for some years was about to chair his first course team and he was worried about controlling the conflict he was sure would erupt between certain team members. Because the team rejected the idea of me joining them as a consultant we agreed to discuss his experiences after each team meeting for a year. Further, we agreed to tape our discussions for use in future research.

This consultancy introduced two new variables - trying to make sense of the dynamics in a separate situation and using a tape recorder. As our discussions progressed I found that anxieties in the team were being re-enacted between the

two of us. Further, because our discussions were on tape there seemed to be less need to make sense at the time of what was happening spontaneously between us. This avoidance of the uncomfortable business of consultancy, of confronting and clarifying events, resulted in the anxieties being dumped into me. I gradually became the one who needed help, confused and guilty about making demands on him about commitment. In other words, our roles became reversed and my ability to make sense of his situation through our spontaneous experiences of each other was reduced. However, as I gradually felt worse and needed counselling or supervision myself, his course team appeared to work better.

SUMMER SCHOOL INTERVENTION

Many anxieties which derive from the separation between those who produce courses and the students who study them at a distance appear to be carried forward to summer schools. These staff as well as students are caught up in the dynamics of resolving anxieties about authority as well as personal identity e.g. being a man or woman, old or young, parent or spouse. In this third example I was requested by an administrator to consult with staff during two weeks in summer school because of previous difficulties with a tutor and students in two courses. It took some months to get agreement from all the different levels of the university but it was not practical to get the agreement of the one hundred staff and seven hundred students at summer school.

In brief, I quickly became a helpful person for some and a persecutory one for others. Although I was able to be of some practical help, this painful experience carried on after summer school with staff in the region who became split over the importance of personal counselling for students compared to counselling for study skills. I concluded in an article "there is a constant pressure for technical skills to shape meaning and for human relationships to be neglected over the intellectual and rational. Answers to problems come to be seen as a matter of information, that enough quantity broken down and dichotomized into computer-digestible bits will keep the system going" (Nicodemus, 1985 p.104).

SUMMER SCHOOL INTERVIEWING

The fourth and last example illustrates another activity included under consultancy. I agreed to help three colleagues based in the regions to study the impact of summer schools on students and staff. The three colleagues, called Senior Counsellors, support students in every way necessary within the OU. My role was to listen to the tape recordings of the Senior Counsellor's interviews of students and staff and then meet with them to discuss what the interviews

revealed. This exercise required considerable trust for two reasons. Because I enquired into the interviewer's reluctance to probe into areas of the students' anxieties they needed to trust my intentions. The powerful emotional impact on me as well as the interviewer was a dramatic revelation of how apprehensions about and experiences of summer school could spill over into relationships at home as well as work. The difficulty of listening to the undercurrents alone at home brings up the second point about trust. I needed to trust my colleagues who did the interviews to help me work through the emotions that the tapes stirred up in me. I was even further removed from the original situation than in my consultancy with the chairman. I would not have been able to complete listening to the tapes if I had not been able to look forward to a face-to-face situation for myself.

I will give you just one example of some of the issues which came up from an interview with a summer school tutor. Examples from summer schools tend to be more variable and unique than those from other situations. A young and inexperienced woman tutor arrived for her first week of summer school. Unlike most tutors she did not tutor the course during the year. She was paired with a male tutor to work together and co-tutor the students. He had been there the previous week, was older, more experienced and tutored during the year as well. As events progressed she quickly felt undermined by her male co-tutor to the extent, as she described it, of feeling "paranoid". Combined with a difficult student group, relationships between all the men and women tutors polarized and involved students as well as other staff. Reflecting back on the confusing and distressing events the woman tutor concluded that "women have to live it out ... we have to do all this sort of thing. We have to be, more modest is too strong a word, women have to be allowed enough space to put forward ideas and show them in action and contradict stereotypes." (From tape transcript.) Although she wanted to be more assertive, she felt pressured to be submissive, not dominant or even responsible. She recognised how she was caught up in acting out anxieties about gender and generation which were not discussed among staff. But she regretted the lack of an opportunity for staff to learn from their own experiences and share them with students rather than just involving them in acting out anxieties.

It is important to recognize that difficulties in institutions are usually not expressions of personal inadequacy. People who are vulnerable, for whatever reasons, provide opportunities for learning about the dynamics which lead to creativity and change. But if this potential is to be realized, the institution

requires commitment from the leadership to use the opportunities as part of staff development.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

How do we bring all the examples from consultancy above into some coherent picture? I have found three perspectives, each with a substantial literature, which may help us focus on some fundamental issues. Associated with perspectives from education, therapy and systems analysis are three issues about - 1. dependence 2. facilitating change and 3. clarifing complexity.

In reality each issue contributes to the other, particularly in the development of trust. Struggling for one's own autonomy against authority and the vulnerability of dependence is an issue in most of our examples. In the consultancy with a course team chairman roles were reversed with my authority and responsibility compromised. But loss of skills must be a possible outcome in negotiating anything of significance. Development may be avoided or inhibited by the rejection of authority, change and complexity. But the processes which underlie such rejections are also an aspect of development.

Struggles over authority lead to a clearer idea about who you are in a team or what a team is in a complex system. Stereotyping and retreat from the present into past precedents or future ideals leads to testing out underlying phantasies and their modification. The development of thought toward symbols that will integrate and resolve conflict occurs at the most basic level through emotions. Only with trust can a symbol such a team represent interdependence among autonomous groups. Finally, at the level of the institution, policy or procedure used defensively also leads to clarifying different levels of relationships and thinking about changes between them. Although you may think the statement "leads to" is optimistic, what I am attempting to draw attention to is a dynamic process in which integration evolves out of disintegration when there are words or symbols to think about what is going on rather than just acting out the anxieties.

A team and what this notion signifies becomes more integrated within a distance teaching system develops through testing out phantasies about interdependence. When one outcome is increased trust, people are able to work together in an integrated way. The remoteness of so much of the distance teaching system for students and staff may be comfortable for some and a problem for others. For students we have built into the system many features to compensate for the lack of direct face-to-face relationships. The OU situation for

academics may be more difficult. Staff based in the centre of Milton Keynes work on time scales of years and are deprived of feedback on their course. Their reality is of separation of their tasks from colleagues who develop their work further, such as editors, use it long after, such as part-time tutors, or in other situations independent of the OU.

For academics the lack of clear or close boundaries, of beginnings and endings and direct personal relationships, may create a vague sense of disappointment. Disappointment may be misread as caused by frustrations in a large and complex institution. If an institution only responds to superficial causes by changing organizational structure and roles, then the deeper and more dynamic sources of anxiety will be missed. Even more, the important moments of transition from feeling that others are responsible for problems to recognizing that you are responsible may not be recognized, tolerated or supported. In other words, to successfully manage a group some conflict has to be allowed as part of a necessary developmental process. It is important for every member of a team to know when to intervene or to take on the role of consultancy. The main task of an external consultant is to make himself redundant as soon as possible.

SOURCES OF THEORY

In such a brief paper it is probably most efficient to refer you to some of the literature where you can read about the theoretical perspectives I have found useful. Eric Miller (1988) director of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations describes three of the sources which have influenced consultancy of this kind. It includes the human relations school in the USA and, especially in Britain, psychodynamic and systems theory. At the Tavistock the unique blend of therapeutic, educational and socio-technical approaches have helped people explore their involvement in the dynamics between individual, group and institution. For example, the development of an ego function in the personality helps one to distinguish what is outside from inside, self from other or feelings from the cause of feelings. Teams also develop a sense of integration internally and with the distance teaching system through the struggles of individuals within them.

Under stress, boundaries disappear and thoughts become threatening because they are felt to be the same as actions. One consequence, described by a highly experienced consultant Isabel Menzies Lyth (1988), is a collusive interaction between organizational structure and individual behaviour. Tasks are arranged in a way that defend against anxiety about the task and contribute to inefficiency, frustration and disappointment. For example, in a workshop I conducted

recently on teamwork some clerical staff felt they were "fed" work in a mechanical way while the work of administrative and academic colleagues was hardly supervised at all. I had the impression that very different groups of staff such as these never had the opportunity to confront each other with their perceptions of reality and to think together how to change it. It was particularly significant that the single largest group of staff, the secretaries, although invited to participate in the workshop were not represented. Most of those I have talked to privately have many good ideas about managing work but, as we have seen above, who is allowed to say what is a problem.

Matti Harris, who worked in the Tavistock Clinic, describes a programme of training which helps make clear the contributions to psychodynamic theory of two psychoanalysts - Wilfred Bion and Melanie Klein. Through training in observation and the application of theory one may become more receptive to the projection of anxiety into oneself and use this evidence to infer mental process in others. Opportunity for discussion help you follow, imagine and think about observations, including the effects of the observer on the situation. (Harris, 1981). In our workshop on teamwork we practiced some of these skills but the activities also polarized two groups - the administrators and academics - the former wanting practical advice, the latter more used to struggling with the uncertainties in teams. I was not invited to repeat the workshop the following year.

The Dean of Bristol Cathedral, Wesley Carr, and his American colleague (Carr and Shapiro, 1989) describe how a consultant works from internally experienced data based on a group's reaction to him and how he responds. He makes clear that a consultant may often experience anxieties more acutely than his clients, and regress more rapidly towards primitive defenses. Part of the skill of consultancy involves being aware of this and using it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I suggest that an institution committed to the values of consultancy that I have outlined here will enable staff to acquire a practical language to describe, share and test out their ideas about the impact of the institution on the work of individuals. Enquiring into the spontaneous events of the here-and-now will, however, be strenuously resisted but more often in a passive way because it seems safer or, at least, more positive to avoid confrontation with the sources of despair as well as hope.

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